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All Bent out of Shape over Yoga

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By Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs



Not being a flexible person, yoga got me all bent out of shape attempting to keep up with one of [Naval Hospital Bremerton's](#) more popular weekly classes.

As classmate smoothly limbered up around me in NHB's Wellness Center under the calm and helpful gaze of NHB Health Promotion director and yoga instructor Janet Mano, it quickly became apparent that deactivated ships are more pliable than I am. Naval Academy nose tackles long retired bend easier than me. Engaging in some pretzel moves more suitable for a game of twister is but a dim childhood memory. So yoga has always seemed like an unyielding undertaking to even comprehend trying.

Yet the ranks of believers are gaining strength. Several times a week, yoga classes are offered at NHB for staff members and eligible beneficiaries. Mano's yoga class is what she refers to as an 'American-hybrid' that focuses on 'slow and flow.'

"This yoga class is specifically for folks with limited mobility," said Mano. "I tell participants to be sure to always let an instructor know their limitations, and that instructor will gladly and expertly assist in helping to modify their poses so that they enhance strength, flexibility and range of motion without strain or pain."

Okay, so yoga invokes awkward body contortions, improbable nasal exertions, unthinkable psychic applications and a whole host of similar lame excuses that I have routinely come up with to not even attempt any kind of yoga. But what exactly is yoga? Is it a demanding discipline, a pseudo-practice, some eccentric exercise? A combination of all three?

There are several variations of the ancient practice, and the American-hybrid' type that Mano shares at NHB is hatha-yoga, which is based on physical postures, breathing exercise and muscle control that is becoming increasingly popular in Western culture.

"We slowly strive to present functional moves that emphasis core work, strength for the upper body, and flexibility," said Mano. "We flow from the ground up, from feet to knees to hamstrings and glutes and on up to our upper torso. Yoga is very accommodating. It can give anyone a good workout."

There are, it turns out, some intriguing historical facts on yoga, which in Sanskrit, the

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February 2015 (13)
January 2015 (12)
December 2014 (17)
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classical language of Hindus in India, means ‘union.’ It’s based on a spiritual discipline of mind and body that has been practiced in Buddhism and Hinduism religions for thousands of years. Yoga originated in India over 5,000 years ago, and apparently has traveled quite well since then. It’s been guesstimated that there may be more people currently engaged with yoga in California than in the Indian sub-continent.



Janet Mano (middle front), Naval Hospital Bremerton Health Promotion director and yoga instructor, leads her class through a ‘flow and slow’ portion of her ‘American-hybrid’ hatha-yoga class. (Photo by Doug Stutz).

The yoga type that most Westerners are familiar is the hatha yoga version that is based on physical posture and control to actively boost a person’s health and wellness. A woman doing yoga is referred to as a ‘yogini’ and a guy doing yoga is referred to as a ‘yogi,’ although there’s no apparent connection to either the popular cartoon bear or iconic Yankee catcher and skipper of old. No yoga yore there. Under tutelage of a yoga guru, a yogini and yogi strive for the union of body and mind, and it’s estimated that there’s approximately 16 million people in North America practicing yoga. So what does that many people know that I don’t about this practice-phenomenon?

To an untrained eye such as mine, yoga seems to be all about graceful coordination, symmetry and balance in all things body and mind. I might have felt that way once, but it had to be during the first enlistment. I was defiant on trying, and even attempting to try. Time spent on yoga is time away from running. Yoga just seemed unnatural, which is the same feeble rationalization I used for stretching before or after a run.

The hour-long class, as Mano attested, flowed and slowed...quickly. The core work did engage the abdomen muscles. We did focus on stabilizing the hips, increase mobility and strengthen the upper body. It was more of a workout than anticipated.

The therapeutic benefits of yoga are increasingly being used by all service branches for wounded troops returning from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rear Adm. Tom Steffens

October 2014 (15)
September 2014 (20)
August 2014 (14)
July 2014 (13)
June 2014 (8)
May 2014 (11)
April 2014 (9)
March 2014 (14)
February 2014 (7)
January 2014 (7)
December 2013 (7)
November 2013 (12)
October 2013 (7)
September 2013 (14)
August 2013 (13)
July 2013 (11)
June 2013 (22)
May 2013 (15)
April 2013 (14)
March 2013 (14)
February 2013 (14)
January 2013 (12)
December 2012 (11)
November 2012 (11)
October 2012 (7)
September 2012 (9)
August 2012 (12)
July 2012 (13)
June 2012 (17)
May 2012 (22)
April 2012 (14)
March 2012 (13)
February 2012 (14)
January 2012 (13)
December 2011 (13)
November 2011 (20)
October 2011 (22)
September 2011 (12)
August 2011 (16)

(Ret.), former Navy SEAL, recently shared in an article, ‘[Adaptive Yoga Changes Lives](#),’ that the ability to relax, renew and recharge is there through yoga.

That would indeed seem to be the case, even for someone as awkward as me.

For more information on NHB’s wellness center and yoga classes, click [here](#).

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